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File Code: 3420
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Date: September 23, 2005

Subject: Potential Insect and Disease Prevention/Suppression Project, Pecos Ranger District

To: Forest Supervisor, Santa Fe National Forest

On September 20, Dave Conklin of our staff met with George Alter (Santa Fe NF) to examine a potential insect and disease prevention/suppression project area on the Pecos District. This area is part of the La Cueva fuelbreak, which extends along Forest Road 375 northwest of Pecos.

This fuelbreak consists of five designated blocks, each 150 to 250 acres in size, transitioning from ponderosa pine/piñon-juniper at the lower end (Block D) to pine/mixed conifer at the upper end (Block A). The fifth block--Alamitos (located between A and B)--has already been thinned and prescribed burned (fall 2004), while the upper half of Block C was thinned earlier this year. The remaining untreated portions of the fuelbreak were examined as candidates for I & D funding. We agreed to exclude Block D from consideration because of its large non-commercial (piñon-juniper) component.

Block A. This area contains a good mix of Douglas-fir, white fir, and ponderosa pine; southwestern white pine is present as a minor component. Small sawtimber, poles, and saplings comprise the majority of stems; relatively few large trees are present. Other than some selective logging decades ago, this area has never been thinned. Densities easily exceed 500 stems/acre throughout most of the area. Site quality is low to moderate.

This area has extensive ponderosa pine dwarf mistletoe infection; it appeared that up to 90% of the area is affected. Light to moderate infection also occurs in the Douglas-fir component.

Blocks B and C (lower half). These areas are both predominantly ponderosa pine, with significant amounts of Douglas-fir and occasional white fir. Rocky Mountain juniper is common in the understory, contributing to ladder fuels. Stands here are mostly second-growth (80 to 90 year-old and younger), with occasional older trees. The majority of these areas were thinned about 20 years ago to 10 to 12-foot average spacing. The northwest edge of Block B and the southeastern portion of Block C have never been thinned. Site quality is low to moderate.

Ponderosa pine dwarf mistletoe occurs in scattered infection centers throughout these units, and is moderate overall. Roughly one-half of the acreage appeared to be affected.

Recommendations. Blocks B and C (the remaining lower half) should clearly benefit a thinning favoring the best dominant and codominant trees. Here, the dwarf mistletoe infection, while somewhat problematic, is at least manageable. There are good pine "leave trees" in most areas; Douglas-fir can be favored in some infected areas. We recommend cutting all infected



trees less than 5" dbh, and retaining lightly infected trees greater than 5" dbh where they are the best available leave trees.

An average spacing of around 20 feet should reduce fire hazard and increase overall stand growth and vigor; spacing should vary to favor the best trees and create a more irregular structure. Somewhat closer spacing would be appropriate within the areas that have never been thinned and within groups of healthy saplings. The results achieved in the upper end of Block C appear satisfactory; we would anticipate similar results following treatment of these areas. Thinning these areas would generate a large amount of accessible firewood for the nearby low-income communities.

Although Block A could potentially benefit from thinning—especially from a fuels reduction standpoint—we agreed that treatment of this area should be a lower priority than Blocks B or C. Effective treatment here would be more difficult because of the severity of the mistletoe and the large amount of slash that would be generated. This area is also somewhat less accessible for fuelwood gathering than the lower blocks.

Based on our examination of these areas, George plans to develop an FY 2006 proposal for treatment of portions of Blocks B and C. The strategies outlined above would provide effective dwarf mistletoe management and reduce bark beetle susceptibility. We recommend that thinning of ponderosa pine stands be conducted between July 15 and December 15 to reduce the potential for outbreaks of *Ips* beetles. Please contact us if you have questions about this evaluation.

/s/ David Conklin (for):
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New Mexico Zone Leader, Forest Health

cc:
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